

SENATOR JOHN BREAUX
Opening Statement
Special Committee on Aging
"Technology and Prescription Drug Safety"
May 3, 2001

I thank the Chairman for calling this timely and interesting hearing on "Technology and Prescription Drug Safety" and I thank our witnesses for being here today.

Almost two years ago the Institute of Medicine released their report, *To Err is Human*, which caught the nation off-guard when it stated that up to 98,000 deaths occur each year due to medical errors. I was further alarmed to learn that close to 20,000 of these deaths are caused by preventable medication errors. During the course of today's hearing we will learn about the innovative ways that physicians, pharmacists and consumers are working to improve the efficiency of prescription drug delivery while reducing needless errors that cost both dollars and human lives.

Health care in the United States continues to make impressive progress even though Congress has thus far been unable to modernize the Medicare program. As we continue to consider reforming our national health insurance program we must work to develop a health care system that is flexible enough to incorporate cutting-edge technologies without over-burdening it with reams of regulations and micro-management.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today because our country's health care delivery system continues to be plagued by medical errors. Every year 770,000 people are injured or die in hospitals due to an adverse drug event -- and that figure is for hospitals alone. As we will hear from Mr. Marty McKay, the President of the Louisiana Pharmacy Association, long-term care facilities are also rife with prescription errors and the number of adverse drug events that occur in the outpatient setting remains unknown, but is presumed significant.

Today we will hear that these problems have not gone unanswered. I look forward to hearing from our physician, pharmacist and consumer-oriented witnesses about the new technology that has begun to address this serious problem of prescribing errors. Thank you.